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Dr Mark I McCormick

Reader

School of Marine Biology & Aquaculture

Dr Diana Wright  
Executive Policy Advisor  
Department of the Environment and Heritage  
GPO Box 787  
Canberra ACT

*r.e. SUBMISSION- Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority review*

Dear Dr Wright

The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA) is currently being reviewed and in this process may lose its status as a statutory authority. It is my view that GBRMPA should retain its role as a statutory authority, reporting directly to the Minister, rather than reporting to the Department of Environment and Heritage in Canberra.

GBRMPA has been a world leader in the conservation of tropical marine reefs and is seen as a guiding light when it comes to the management of complex marine resources globally. This fact was emphasised at the World Congress on Aquatic Protected Areas in 2002 when all international speakers compared their attempts at conserving reefs (e.g. Jim Bohnsack and the Florida Keys) to the success that the GBRMPA was having with the developing Representative Areas Program. This success has only been possible by being able to respond to the local needs of the populations on the coastal fringe of Queensland. It is generally perceived that the public is responsive to GBRMPA because they are an official body that manages the reef and that is located locally. If the public perceived that the decisions affecting their leisure activities or livelihoods (for fishers) were being made in Canberra, they would not be as receptive.

The recent rezoning of the reef has been very successful and has once again established GBRMPA as a global leader in reef conservation. Management of such a complex resource with many and varied stakeholders is a difficult task and requires the powers of a statutory authority. Whether simply perceived or in actuality, if the power for change was placed in the hands of DEH in Canberra, decisions may be more politically influenced than they would otherwise have been. The capacity for decisions on reef management, and the regulations required to implement these decisions, need to be made locally be responsive to local needs. This decentralisation of statutory power is a model that has been proven internationally. It seems like a retrograde step to place the power back in Canberra.

To the best of my knowledge, GBRMPA has always kept the relevant Ministers informed of decisions and issues of interest to them. Moreover, GBRMPA staff have shown that they have strong professional ethic, and view public consultation as an important part of management decisions. This has been recently demonstrated by the extensive consultative phases that were entrenched in the Representative Areas Program. Although GBRMPA has received some criticism for their consultation on RAP, no other authorities have ever embarked on such a large consultative process. GBRMPA freely admits that they could improve (and have done so in press), but their level of commitment to the stakeholders sets a new benchmark for consultation for other statutory authorities to emulate. Recent discussions I have had with GBRMPA staff suggest that this level of engagement with stakeholders is being further increased to engender a feeling of ownership of decisions. This is the only effective way to manage such a complex public resource.

I strongly believe that it would be a mistake to remove the statutory authority status from  
GBRMPA.

Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mark McCormick". The signature is written in a cursive style with a vertical red line to its right.

Mark McCormick  
28<sup>th</sup> September 2005